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SUBJECT: ARGENTINE MOD GARRE OFFERS A CORDIAL WELCOME TO AMBASSADOR

¶1. (SBU) Argentine Minister of Defense Nilda Garre warmly received the Ambassador October 23, immediately expressing her pleasure at being able to welcome a woman in the post of U.S. Ambassador. Garre spoke with satisfaction of U.S.-Argentine security cooperation and described her September visit to Washington and her call on Secretary Gates in very positive terms. Still, she began with a suggestion that the two countries should "update" ("actualizar") the bilateral relationship, an apparent reference to her desire to pursue a revision of longstanding defense cooperation agreements.

¶2. (SBU) Invited by the Ambassador to describe her goals for the Ministry, Garre mentioned a number of priorities and said that overall the armed forces were undergoing "profound changes." Interestingly, she said that one clear goal defined by former President Nestor Kirchner and continued by current President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner was that she work to mend the rift between the military and civil society. This rift, she suggested, had persisted from the days of Argentina's military dictatorship.

¶3. (U) Garre described the Argentine regional context as a "zone of peace," but said that within that context she had an obligation to keep the military establishment orderly and to modernize it. She listed efforts to improve planning and logistics, instill human rights principles in training, address gender issues in the military, enhance the military's international coordination as among her priorities, and develop joint strategic plans by the armed forces for the short, medium and long-term. Garre said that within the confines of a difficult and limited budget, she also hoped to contribute to revitalizing defense industries and to see them as contributing to employment in the country. Science and technology was another area where the military could make important contributions, she said.

¶4. (U) Asked by the Ambassador about Argentina's international peacekeeping contributions, Garre noted that the country had in 2008 marked fifty years as a contributor to international peacekeeping efforts, and that this commitment was a policy of state accepted by all political persuasions in the country. She noted efforts to coordinate humanitarian actions with Peru in Haiti. (Note: She was referring to the combined Peru-Argentina Engineering Company, which will have horizontal and vertical construction capability along with water drilling and distribution.) The Argentine-Chilean peacekeeping brigade, Cruz del Sur, should be fully established sometime in 2010, Garre said.

Bio Notes

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¶5. (U) Garre commiserated with the Ambassador over the distance she was experiencing from grandchildren, saying that she felt this during her only extended period of living outside Argentina, for seven months as Ambassador to Venezuela in 2004-2005. Turning to the subject of spicy food (not at all indigenous to Argentina), Garre noted that her ex-husband, Juan Manuel Abal Medina, a leftist

rebel sought by the then military dictatorship, had spent six years in the Mexican Embassy to Buenos Aires; he had been amazed that three successive Mexican Ambassadors had begun their days eating ground green peppers.

16. (SBU) Garre has been notably more accessible and effusive towards U.S. interlocutors since her return from her September trip to the United States and Ambassador Martinez's arrival. She followed up this meeting by accepting the Ambassador's dinner invitation to the Residence in honor of the U.S.-Argentina Bilateral Working Group Meeting. Garre, who had never before accepted an invitation to the Residence, was garrulous, friendly, and lingered after the meal, asking for a mini-tour of the Residence before she departed.

MARTINEZ